



IMPROVING WETLANDS

FOR WATERFOWL

Biology Job Sheet TX-16

Wetlands are the most productive wildlife lands in the country providing breeding and feeding grounds for millions of waterfowl. As part of the Central Flyway, Texas serves as winter home for thousands of ducks and geese each year.

Important duck foods include millets, pondweeds, smartweeds, panic grasses, acorns, spike rush, duckweeds, sedges, corn, rice, soybeans, sorghum, widgeongrass, watershield, and coontail. Important geese foods include Olney's threesquare, cordgrass shoots and roots, cattail roots, waste grain, ryegrass, winter wheat and rice shoots. (One thousand pounds of seed produced on an acre will support about 30 ducks all winter).

The following wetland areas can be improved for waterfowl:

1. Inland and coastal area fresh meadows
 - a. Install levee system and pipe water control structures to manipulate water levels and thus control the natural plant communities. A U. S. Army Corps of Engineers 404 permit will be required.
 - b. Plant winter wheat or ryegrass in the fall for geese when summers are sufficiently dry to allow seedbed preparation in the fall. No ditching or levelling can occur without "swampbusting".
2. Marshland -
 - a. Poor waterfowl food plants such as giant cutgrass, maidencane or cattails can be plowed or disked out if the marsh dries naturally. The area can then be planted to choice duck foods without being in violation of "swampbuster" laws if no ditching or levelling occurs
 - b. Cattle grazing can be used to control unwanted plants such as cutgrass and maidencane, and as a result, favor good duck food plants.
 - c. Burning or mowing dense native vegetation in the fall can increase open water areas in those years when conditions are right to allow this.

- d. If water control structures are present, water levels can be manipulated to favor or control certain plants. Water control structures can be installed if a U. S. Army Corps of Engineers 404 permit is obtained.
- e. Chemical control may be possible when properly labeled herbicides are used and are economically justifiable.

3. Brackish marshes

- a. Carrying out a fall prescribed burning plan on a portion of the range each year will produce young shoots and tubers of cordgrasses available for geese and open up more water areas for ducks.
- b. Livestock grazing in winter months after burning can control excessive cordgrass growth improving goose habitat.
- c. Depending on the salinity and existing water control capabilities, leveed areas in or adjacent to brackish marshes may be developed into widgeongrass areas. The salinity needs to be about one-third seawater strength.

4. Cropland fields adjacent to wetland areas -

- a. Levee up and install water control structures, if a water source such as canal, irrigation reservoir or well is available. Plant to millets, corn, soybean, or rice. After harvesting grain, flood to 4-15 inches in October and drain in March.
- b. Plant to ryegrass or winter wheat in the fall for geese.
- c. Waste grain from rice and soybeans and green growth rice plants provide excellent habitat for geese. Simply leave the residue after cropping the field.